

Testimony of Brian Anderson Before the Public Health Committee
March 8, 2013
Re: SB 115

Chairman Johnson, Chairman Gerratana and members of the Public Health Committee:

Council 4 supports SB 115, An Act Concerning The Approval Process For Residential Nursing Facilities Serving Inmates And Mental Health Patients. This bill would prevent the state from putting inmates who have not finished their prison sentence into group homes.

Council 4 opposes putting these inmates into nursing homes on safety and privatization grounds. We have heard that the inmates who would be sent to the homes are in such bad shape that they will not be able to be a security threat. We have no doubt of the administration's sincerity about this. However, our correction employee members can tell you that the one constant with inmates is unpredictability.

While an inmate may be unable to walk, he or she still may be able to engage in, direct or encourage others to commit crimes over the phone. An inmate may have grudges with other criminals that are not readily apparent or known to correction or nursing home officials. We know that in some criminal circles, such as gangs or organized crime rings, that status is achieved by inflicting harm on or killing an enemy or member of a rival group. It would not necessarily matter that such a targeted person is ambulatory or not.

It sounds very much as if the main security in such a nursing home will be provided by low wage, low trained (or perhaps completely untrained) private security guards. This is a bad idea. The inmates have a prison sentence for a reason. They should be under watch 24/7 by trained law enforcement personnel such as correction officers. We have heard that parole officers will be providing some security. No doubt this means that there will be occasional visits by parole officers, not constant security. By admitting that there is a need for parole officers visits, is it not admitting that there is still a law enforcement need?

The irony is that this nursing home plan is being pursued for cost reasons. The crazy federal budget situation and poor economy pressure the state to come up with any method to save money, almost no matter how desperate.

It is better for the legislature and governor to raise sufficient funds to keep inmates behind bars and remanded to the custody of the Department of Correction. There is a way to do this. Council 4 urges the legislature, including your Committee, and the governor to implement the Better Choices coalition budget. This budget restores common sense taxation on the richest families, who have had vast tax breaks for the last thirty years, closes corporate tax loopholes and provides the tools for the state to collect all the corporate tax that it is due under current law.

In the meantime, we urge your support of SB 115. Thank you very much.